

THE THIRD ARTICLE • FREE WILL

JUNE 2009

# Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness



**Sinners**



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come together in my name,  
there am I with them."*

— Matthew 18:20



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“Since dead sinners have no spiritual free will, God himself needs to change them. And he does.”



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✝ The official magazine of the  
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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MAY THE LORD OUR GOD  
BE WITH US AS HE WAS  
WITH OUR FATHERS;  
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US  
NOR FORSAKE US.  
*1 Kings 8:57*

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## WHAT'S INSIDE

by Julie Wietzke

Are you like me where you sometimes overlook the work done by the Holy Spirit? The sheer fact that the Holy Spirit has called us by the gospel and created faith in our hearts should bring us to our knees, but often we can take this life-giving work for granted.

Pastor Brett Brouer, in a two-part series on free will, reminds us of where we were before the Holy Spirit brought us to faith. We were dead in our sins and unable to please God (p. 10). Only after the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts are we able to do good works—and only with his help. Linda Buxa reminds us that just as the Holy Spirit was with the first-century believers as they lived their faith so he is also with us as we share what we know about our Savior (p. 12).

Still feeling like you want to know more about the Holy Spirit? A new Bible study series on the Third Article will give us all a refresher on who the Holy Spirit is and the work that he does (p. 33).

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## SCIENCE AND SCRIPTURE

I enjoy the articles on science vs. faith. However, in the March issue, Mark Paustian seemed to say that if you think science supports Scripture, it is a weakness, and reason has no place in what God says. . . .

I taught science in college for over 30 years and where science seemed contrary to Scripture, I found true science had not been used. A body's appendix had been hailed as an organ with no purpose and proof of evolution. An appendix does not support evolution nor disprove creation. I told my students we were just not smart enough to figure it out, and someday we might be. Well, we finally got smart enough to discover the purpose of the appendix. It serves as a reservoir for good bacteria in the intestines.

The point is that I did not have to lose reason to know that God knew what he was doing when he created the appendix and that someday we might be smart enough to figure it out.

*Charlene L. Hartlaub  
Manitowac, Wisconsin*

## KEEPING YOUTH IN THE WORD

In "Where are all the young people?" [April], I appreciate and agree with much of what President Schroeder wrote about parents having responsibility in keeping young people in God's Word. However, as a young person, his solutions did not satisfy me. . . . Why at UW-Milwaukee do we have more than 500 area Lutheran high school graduates with so few of us attending a

Milwaukee church now? Our elders wonder why we can't be kept or held in church. Fortunately, God gave me a challenging roommate situation in my freshman year of college that turned me to his Word on my own time. And that is the point: God is the one who's in control. Parents, pastors, and teachers cannot instill love for God's Word by making decisions for their teens. . . . Make sure your child's education is more than "good on paper" and develop your relationship with them by building a faithful Christian life.

*Patrick Behringer  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

President Schroeder's encouragement and admonition to parents ["Where are all the young people" April] is timely and legitimate. Parents are the most important influence in a child's life, second only to that of the Holy Spirit. . . .

While we all recognize the role of parents in the spiritual development of their children, we also cannot diminish or ignore the role the church plays in it. President Schroeder touches on this also when he says, "There is much that the congregation and the synod can do."

The findings of the national research study "Why Young People Leave WELS" (2005) and the follow-up "Survey of WELS Teens" (2007) affirmed that parents are very influential ([www.wels.net/jump/youthstudy](http://www.wels.net/jump/youthstudy)), but they also clearly pointed to the role of the church itself in young people's level of commitment. Along with that data, 30 years of ministry to and with youth has shown me that when congregations offer preaching and teaching that truly engages youth; present worship that is focused on the means of grace, yet done with excellence and relevance; offer youth meaningful ways to engage in ministry side-by-side with other generations; and lovingly demonstrate to

youth that their opinions and participation really matter; youth tend to stick around.

*Dr. Joel A. Nelson, Administrator  
Commission on Youth Discipleship*

## OUR SINLESS SAVIOR

In the Lenten devotion on Psalm 69 [Mar.], the writer states that the Holy One became a sinner. When we use such language, we are walking a fine line, theologically speaking. When Jesus took on himself the sins of the world, he took on himself the status of sinner. In God's court he was judged guilty because our sins were imputed to his account. Yet, in spite of taking on the status of sinner, Jesus himself, in his person, remained sinless. How could one who bore all sin still remain sinless? That is the mystery that we ponder in Lent.

*Michael Thom  
New Ulm, Minnesota*

## THE SACRAMENTS AND SALVATION

As I read the March Q&A, I was glad to see that Forrest Bivens dispatched a common misconception by making it clear that Baptism is not an automatic guarantee of faith and salvation. However, I would have liked to have seen the article go a little further in explaining why Baptism does not save. Lutheran teachings make it clear that it is not the outward ceremony by which the Holy Spirit engenders faith into salvation, but the divine promise of forgiveness in Christ that the ceremony proclaims. . . .

*Gary Branscome  
La Vergne, Tennessee*

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# Love money?

*Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:5,6*

Stephen H. Geiger

We know it's not right to love money.

When the image of Midas counting coins comes to mind, we remember the tragic consequence—love for gold reduced his daughter to lifeless metal. If fiction gives hints, the apostle Paul's words to Timothy leave no doubt: "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10).

We don't want to love money. We know that trust in money is misplaced. We know that looking to money as if it were our god is wrong.

Yet do you ever find yourself doing just that?

## The love of money

We may not wake up each morning bowing down to our wallets, and we may not whisper declarations of love into the ears of our financial statements.

But we may be quite familiar with fear. We can become afraid after losing a huge amount of money; we wonder how life will now need to change. We can become afraid when we hardly have enough money to pay next month's rent.

We may also be familiar with false confidence. We can think our financial futures are solid because we've saved for years and our investment choices seem to be the right ones. Even if our savings accounts are not so large, we still may place confidence in them, sure that with our thriftiness they will carry us through.

Do you love money?

We know it's not right to love money, but at times we find ourselves doing just that. We didn't think we could become so afraid, but we have. We did not think we could so thoughtlessly bump God down on our list of priorities, but we have. Our sinful flesh so easily trades the preserver of the universe for paper and numbers that moth and rust will surely destroy.

Just judgment should destroy us as well.

## The love of our God

In our shame, the voice of true treasure speaks. There was a substitute who walked in our sandals. In the face of his own temptations to be self-confident and to fear, he repeatedly confessed, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid."

Even Jesus' enemies recognized this. "He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him" (Matthew 27:43). So much did Jesus trust his Father that he was willing to drink the bitterest of cups so that we might not have to swallow the penalty that fear and misplaced love deserve. Instead we savor the cup of salvation. We are forgiven. We are at peace.

The God who washed away our love for false treasure now promises that he won't forsake us. He will never leave us. He is our helper. We do not need to be afraid.



"Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them" (Psalm 62:10). In times of prosperity, God has not stopped being our helper. We still depend on him, just as we always have.

When wealth—which is so uncertain—suddenly disappears, do not be afraid. God has not stopped being your helper. He gave you everything you needed before financial difficulty came. He will give you everything you need now that difficulty has come.

Love and trust your God.

*Contributing editor Stephen Geiger, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Risen Savior, Milwaukee.*



# How I see myself

Joel V. Petermann

Journalist Joseph T. Hallinan wrote an article for *Reader's Digest* entitled "7 Dumb Things We Do and 8 Tricks to Keep Errors at Bay" (March 2009, p. 166). He is also the author of a book entitled *Why We Make Mistakes*, from which points in this article were excerpted.

Hallinan certainly doesn't harbor any delusions about the perfection of the human race. What really piqued my interest, however, were the reasons Hallinan listed for some of the "dumb things we do." For example, error number 2 was "We wear rose-colored glasses." He observed that people remember events in their lives differently than they actually happened. Hallinan explains: "Time and again, people have been shown to reconstruct their memories in positive, *self-flattering* ways" (emphasis mine). Likewise, error number 7 was "We think we're better than we are." As if that isn't candid enough, Hallinan states pretty bluntly: "Most of us hate to think of ourselves as average or, heaven forbid, *below* average. So we walk around with this private conceit that we're above average, and therein lies the seed of many of our mistakes."

The problem that Hallinan exposes is that we tend to make some mistakes because we are too focused on ourselves. Consider some of the scandals exposed in our newspapers. At the heart of each of them you have people who were being, well, human. Fallen human beings are focused on themselves, often to the detriment of others. Human beings want money for themselves, fame for themselves, time for themselves, approval for themselves. Isn't it interesting how error numbers 2 and 7 even suggest that we change reality to flatter ourselves?

This isn't just true of the "world out there," is it? Test yourself when someone sends you a picture

they took of a group you were in. Whose picture do you look for first? Why? Isn't it because Self wants to be sure it looks good? How many times have you thought, "I just need some time for myself" or "I'm going to do this for myself"? When was the last time you passed a mirror and didn't check yourself out?

The Bible teaches us about this self. It is the old self. It loves itself. It dotes on itself. It flatters itself. This is the self that Jesus insists we each must deny if we are to be his disciples (Luke 9:23). This self is in error. It thinks it is something when it is not. It thinks it has control when it does not. This self will lead us not just to make mistakes, but into eternal destruction.

The only cure for this self is death. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Praise God that there is a new self that is not

self-focused. My new self is given birth through Jesus Christ, who gave himself for me. The new self, therefore, is Christ in me by faith. It gives itself for others. It thinks of others instead of itself. It serves others, loves others, forgives others, is patient with others, is honest with others.

That's not how I always see myself. Sometimes I see the self that Hallinan saw behind our errors. So rather than focusing on myself, I need to focus on the One who gave himself for me. That's where I see myself as I really am—forgiven and made new.

*Contributing editor Joel Petermann is pastor at St. Paul, Amherst, New Hampshire.*

**Rather than focusing on myself, I need to focus on the One who gave himself for me.**



# QUESTION & ANSWER



Forrest L. Bivens

## Q. What does the statement "He descended into hell" mean?

The mention of Christ's descent into hell was one of the last statements to be placed in the Apostles' Creed (in the fourth century). It might well be the least understood—or most misunderstood—sentence in the creed.

### When did Jesus descend?

Some people merely assume that the statement refers to Christ's suffering the God-forsakenness of hell, a key aspect of his torment on the cross as our sin-bearer. Others consider the phrase a vivid way of stressing that Jesus was *really* dead after his crucifixion by saying he went to the place of the dead.

While Christ's unimaginable suffering and undeniable death on our behalf are truths we cherish, the descent into hell was not a part of his suffering. Instead the creed summarizes 1 Peter 3:18-20: "[Christ] was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago." After Christ died, he was made alive again, and then he descended into hell.

In the creed we note that this sentence comes before we confess our faith in Christ's resurrection. But the church fathers were likely thinking of the public disclosure of Christ's resurrection, not the resurrection itself. Jesus rose, then the angels rolled the stone away from the already empty tomb to let the world in on the glorious truth.

### Why did Jesus descend?

Peter says Jesus "went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago . . . in the days of Noah." After the successful completion of his atoning work for humankind, he went to hell to preach. Why? Some speculated and taught that Jesus preached the gospel in hell, giving a second chance to souls who rejected the gospel when they were living on earth. Hebrews 9:27 forbids this idea.

Others have speculated that Jesus descended into an underworld borderland, a "limbo," to release righteous souls somehow unable to enter heaven

until the work of atonement was completed. There is no biblical support for this idea either.

Jesus descended to preach or proclaim his victory over hell and the devil. This idea is what 1 Peter 3 and the rest of Scripture suggest. It may be what Paul refers to in Colossians 2:15 as well when he says that Christ "made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." The cross is Christ's dramatic way of affirming his victory and leaving no doubt that the gospel of redemption and salvation stands firm despite ridicule and rejection through unbelief.

### Why do we confess Jesus' descent?

The Formula of Concord cites a sermon from Martin Luther that warns us not to "bother ourselves with lofty, sophisticated ideas about how this occurred," as too many in church history have done. Rather we can and should "only hold to the Word" and in this way "retain the heart of this article and derive comfort from it, so that neither hell nor the devil can capture or harm us and all who believe in Christ" (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, IX:3).

Echoing 1 Peter 3 and Colossians 2, we boldly express joyful confidence. Satan is conquered forever and doomed to his own hell—as an inmate, not the warden. Death and hell are forever subdued and defeated, and this truth is proclaimed throughout the universe. We, who deserve hell, have been granted a permanent change of address by the risen and ruling Christ who has redeemed us once and for all—and hell cannot undo that truth.

*Contributing editor Forrest Bivens, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Colvory, Thiensville.*





# ALL SINNERS

God created Adam and Eve with a free will, but when they fell into sin, they became slaves of sin, spiritually dead, and without free will.

Brett A. Brauer

Many Christians are confused about free will. Some hold to dangerous ideas that could become harmful to their faith. That's not new. Because of so many false ideas about *free will* Martin Luther recommended that the term itself be dropped. Yet it is a useful term that can help us understand the teaching of the Bible. We should consider how much, if at all, humans can choose to become Christians.

## Humans had free will

When God created the first humans, he gave them a fully free will. He made them in his image. Adam and Eve were "like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). With eagerness and joy they wanted to do all that God commanded, and they did. They wanted what he wanted. They freely chose to do what he wished. What a joyful and contented life they had!

But then came the fall. Adam and Eve changed drastically. The tempter spoke his lies and false promises. Adam and Eve made a choice. They sinned. As a result, they lost God's image. How differently they acted afterward! Instead of praising and thanking the Lord for all his gifts, they blamed one another, the devil, and even

God for their misdeeds. They even tried to hide from God, who knows all things.

Adam and Eve's loss of God's image passes down to all humans born of man and woman: "Flesh gives birth to flesh" (John 3:6). King David confessed, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5).

## Sinners have no free will

After the fall, humans still have a dim spark of the knowledge of God. "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse"



(Romans 1:20). Humans can make choices about what to eat, where to live, or what kind of car to buy. In a limited way, although only outwardly, sinners can even obey some of the requirements of God's commands. For example, people who do not know or understand God's written law in the Bible still show that the "requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them" (Romans 2:15). Yet every sinner is not free. He or she lacks any power to become a Christian and to choose to do what is pleasing to God.

God's Word describes the lack of spiritual free will in several ways. Humans are in darkness, without any spiritual light. In telling Christians what they were, the apostle wrote, "You were once darkness" (Ephesians 5:8). Those without Christ "are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts" (Ephesians 4:18). When Jesus came into the world as the Savior of all, he was the light, yet "men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

The spiritual corruption of the human heart is total. The prophet Ezekiel pictures his contemporaries as having hearts of stone (Ezekiel 11:19). The prophet Jeremiah lamented about the complete lack of goodness in us: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (17:9). In the strongest statements of all in the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit declares that humans are spiritually dead: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Just as the physically dead cannot think, act, speak, and decide, so also the spiritually dead have no free will to decide to believe in Christ and to do what pleases God.

The judgment of God's Word is clear. The loss of free will is not based on one, single, obscure Bible passage. It's a constant theme of Scripture: humans are thoroughly sinful and without a free will in spiritual matters. "Every inclination of [man's] heart is evil from childhood" (Genesis 8:21). "All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:12). "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God" (Romans 8:7,8). "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

In regard to our own spiritual capacity to do good, Jesus declares, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Jesus did not say, "Apart from me you can do some things." Nor did he say, "You can contribute a tiny part." He speaks the absolute truth: "You can do nothing."

Even though the Bible settles the issue, beliefs to the contrary still persist. Many Christians are attracted to them. These false ideas range from full free will to partial free will; they come from the corrupt human mind, not from God's Word. Human reason objects to God's truth: "If humans have no free will, why does God give commands? It would be unreasonable for him to do so!"

In his book *The Bondage of the Will*, Martin Luther made the point repeatedly that God gave his commands to show sinners their sin. "Through the law we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:20). Scriptural truth stands, no matter what the human mind concludes. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight" (1 Corinthians 3:19).

### God works a change in dead sinners

Since dead sinners have no spiritual free will, God himself needs to change them. And he does. "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Through the gospel the Holy Spirit brings about the change so that the unwilling become willing and trust in Christ. "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Thank God he works such a change! "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4,5).

All who believe God's truths in the Bible humbly acknowledge the complete ruin of free will caused by sin. We humbly confess that we "cannot by [our] own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ . . . or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called [us] by the gospel" (Third Article). We give God all the credit for the change he works in dead sinners so that we believe in Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Brett Brouer is pastor at Trinity, Watertown, Wisconsin.

This is the first article in a two-part series on free will. Find a related Bible study on this topic after June 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net)



# My Pentecost



Even though I don't have a physical flame on top of my head, I still can find ways to tell people about my Savior.

Linda R. Buxa

**S**ometimes I wish God would just put a flame on top of my head.

I mean, that's a conversation starter, isn't it? People would obviously ask me about it, and I could tell them the reason for the hope I have. It would be so much easier if I had more in common with those who were present on that first Pentecost.

"Actually, 21st-century Christians and first-century believers have more in common than we think," says Harry Hagedorn, as he debunks my lame excuse. As administrator of the Board for Home Missions, Hagedorn explains, "They were living in a culture that was vastly different from their own, just like we are. So they buddied up with each other, supported each other, and told everyone they could about our dear Lord, just like we do."

He's right. Looking at the book of Acts, we aren't much different from them. They set an example for us in life and in love and in faith, and we can simply follow in their footsteps.

## Sharing our joy with believers

The followers of the Way, as they came to be known, not only met at church but also were completely devoted to one another outside of church. They prayed and ate together, and some sold their homes and possessions to help one another.

Mary Clemons and her husband, Sam, are following that example. When his poor health caused him to leave the pastoral ministry for a while, they moved to Tucson. Mary determined that moving away from the public ministry did not mean they would stop serving their Savior.

They didn't sell their property and give the proceeds to help believers. Instead, because Mary has the gift of hospitality, they bought a four-bedroom group home that also has a two-bedroom guest home. "It's an open house, and I can't even tell you what a blessing it's

been," she shares, as a friend from Michigan stands next to her and washes the dishes.

They've provided rooms for people they knew well and people they had barely met, for those from out of town and those nearby. "People end up living with us," she says.

They don't just provide a place to stay, however. They hold Bible studies, inviting lifelong believers and people who are not quite ready to come to church. She has a roster of more than 30 women who are invited once a month for a women's gathering. Single parents who can't take off work drop off their sick children—and their laundry—for the day, and Mary takes care of both. She does have one weakness, however. "I don't really like cooking," she says. "But I know it's not about the food. I can't tell you the hours that people have sat around our table crying, laughing, praying."

Yet she feels she gets more out of it than all the people whom she has served. "It's not a tidy life, but it makes for a rich life," she says.

We may not all have the same capacity for hospitality, but we can gather a few people at our home for dinner or Bible study. Or we can go beyond the typical "How are you?" at church and ask, "How can I pray for you?"

Like it was for the first-century believers, wouldn't it be great for guests to walk into our homes and not even see the dust, or minor dust-ups, because they are all covered by love? When people see that, they are bound to ask why we're different, and that opens up a door to talk about Jesus.





### Sharing our faith with unbelievers

That's what the first-century church did. In fact, they could not "help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

"Just like the early believers, we have been given the high privilege of being a part of the harvest," says Hagedorn. "The beautiful thing about being bought and paid for by Christ is that disciples of Jesus daily put off their old self and put on the new self created to be like God in true holiness. With their own unique gifts and their personal witness, they will truly *be* the church in the world."

And this nation desperately needs believers who share the truth. Too many people are enjoying themselves immensely as they skip down the wide road to destruction. The mem-

bers of Sure Foundation, Woodside, New York, see it every day. With a population of almost 2.3 million, the borough of Queens has 10,000 people in every square mile. Sure Foundation members could huddle up and hide out, but they see the mass of people, like Jesus did, as sheep without a shepherd. That's why this group of believers is expanding its worship space from 1,000 to 4,600 square feet. Members are praying that the Holy Spirit uses their witness to bring more people into the family.

Peace in Jesus, Boise, Idaho, is also reaching out to its neighbors. It's just that its neighbors aren't originally from Boise; they are from Vietnam. Pastor Dan Kramer leads worship in Vietnamese and English, holds Bible information classes, and reaches out to families. The congregation also shows love by helping people with their citizenship

classes and providing translation help for their doctor appointments. Though his background and the backgrounds of his members are, literally, a world apart, Kramer doesn't look at their differences. He sees them as people knit together by a loving God and knows that they need the hope he already has.

Just a few miles away in Nampa, Idaho, members of Messiah are known for their ministry to Mormons. However, that's not their only focus. In March, they held "Salvation 101 Sunday." "Millions of people in America have never heard the simple message that salvation is free," says Mark Cares, pastor at Messiah. "And many more think all churches teach that the way to heaven is by being good." Messiah visitors aren't expected to clean up their act before they come. Instead, they are reminded that we are all wounded by sin and we all come to Jesus for healing.

### Sharing our faith despite our shortcomings

There is one more similarity between the early church and today's believers. While we revere the apostles for the special role Jesus gave them, the Bible says they were average Joes—with no offense to anyone named Joe. "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).


None of us ever considers himself or herself worthy enough of the privilege of being a messenger for Jesus. But it's not about us. I hope that when people see you and me, they see our courage and take note that we've been with Jesus—because we have been in his Word. And because of our baptism, the Holy Spirit lives in us.

I don't think I need a flame on my head anymore. There's one in my heart now—and that is the only conversation starter I need.

*Linda Buxa is a member at St. Mark's, Citrus Heights, California.*

*This is the last article in a two-part series on the Pentecost spirit in mission work.*





Seven years ago, David and Terry Enslinger found a home. Not a house in which they can put their feet up, but a place they can rest their hearts and souls.

"It's hard to describe the feeling when I walked out of [Living Word] seven years ago and said, 'We can go to church here. This is it,'" says Terry. "It felt like coming home."

David and Terry had been struggling for years to find a church body that adhered to the Bible, even though at times they grappled with knowing exactly what those teachings entailed. At Living Word, Johnson City, Tenn., they found what they were looking for. "Scripture alone is a reality in WELS," says Terry.

#### Beginnings

Terry grew up as a strict New York Irish Catholic, obeying all the rules and regulations. In 1972 as she was walking her three-month-old son, she had an epiphany. "I looked down on him and thought, 'Do I want him raised the way I was raised?'" The

answer immediately was no," says Terry.

"That was

a God moment because I could never have predicted that this would have happened."

After exploring Catholicism more deeply, Terry says she discovered how it departed from God's Word. "For 30 years, God has been working on me—just pointing me to 'It's Scripture. It's my Word alone. You don't add to it; you don't take away from it. There is one standard, and that is God's Word.'" But at that time Terry didn't know where to find it.

David, on the other hand, was raised Methodist. "My father was known as Mr. Methodism in this area," he says. But David also remembers his parents' love for the Lord and for Scripture. "Dad was a liberal, but he still tried to stay in the Word. I had that in me."

David went on to become a pastor. "I have a seminary background and spent four years in a Methodist college, but we didn't study the Bible very closely," he says. "My message was always ultimately social gospel—to go out there and do and be. I still tried to get there through Scripture, but I didn't really know Scripture."

#### Searching for answers

Terry met David when she attended a Methodist church in Tennessee where David was a

## Confessions of faith

Why are you a member of WELS? What does this church body have that makes it unique from hundreds of others? In this series, you will read about why some choose to join WELS and what members treasure most about being WELS.

Julie K. Wietzke



pastor. David's marriage deteriorated into divorce, and he left the ministry because of the divorce and the changing theology of Methodism. Both divorcees, they began dating and were married in 1990. They soon began church shopping. "We were married in an Episcopal church by a Presbyterian minister," says David, chuckling. "We were all over the map," Terry adds.

A few years later, David was asked to preach at a Disciples of Christ church. "I intended to focus on the Word of God," says David. "Get away from everything but Scripture," Terry adds.

This plan worked for a while but soon butted against the fundamental "beliefs" of that church body. "There was a woman in our church who was a lifelong Disciple," says Terry, "and she said to me that the thing she liked best about the Christian Church Disciples of Christ was that you didn't have to believe anything to belong. That was considered a good thing—a strength."

Terry continues, "In that sense for David to be preaching strictly from Scripture was okay because that fell under the broad umbrella that you can believe anything or nothing. . . . But when they realized that we were serious about God's Word, that's when it all went south."

Socially conservative, David and Terry say they also struggled with the liberalism of the denomination. "A lot of those people would separate Scripture from convictions, and we realized we couldn't do that," says David.

According to Terry, the denomination's lack of religious conviction was the final straw. "[The thought was that] we didn't need to impose Christianity on other people," she says. "The very heart of the gospel was gone."

In 1999, they began searching again, and David took a course on Calvinism. "We essentially went from one extreme to another, from there are no bounds—no doctrine—



David and Terry Ensminger

to a very strict set of rules and practices and doctrine," says Terry.

They left the Disciples of Christ in 2001, and David began filling in as pastor at a local Presbyterian church. They continued to study Calvinism but were unsure of its teachings and biblical interpretations. "The idea of double predestination was just abhorrent to me," says Terry, "that God creates some to go on to glory and he creates some that are doomed, destined to hell."

#### Discovering the truth

In early 2002, Terry and one of her daughters took a class at a local college on 16th-century Reformations. There they were assigned to read Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*. "That was it," says Terry. "I read that, and I said to David, 'This is what we are. We're Lutherans.'"

In February 2002, Terry and her youngest daughter attended Living Word for the first time, and there was no turning back.

They, along with David—who still was preaching at the Presbyterian church—began taking the Bible information class. "Pastor would teach us something, and Terry would say, 'Did you know that?'" says David. "I would say, 'Never heard that before in my life.' He taught us more Greek and Hebrew

than I ever had. It's absolutely amazing."

They were also happy that their pastor focused his teaching on the Word. "It was always Scripture," says Terry. "He never tried to turn it into an intellectual discussion. It was always 'What does the Bible say?'"

David and Terry became members at Living Word in August 2002. Since then they have immersed themselves in the ministry. David is chairman of the evangelism committee and has served as a church elder for six years. Terry directs the vacation Bible school program, teaches Sunday school, and leads a women's Bible study. They also are involved in a new start-up in a nearby town.

David and Terry have seen how God worked through their previous involvement in the Disciples of Christ church. Sixteen members of that church—including David and Terry—are now members at Living Word. "It's one of those things where you have to stand back and say, 'What hath God wrought?'" says Terry. "God used that time to bring people out of darkness."

David and Terry say they are so thankful that God brought them out of the darkness too. "[The world today] is so clouded over with these lies about God's Word and not needing to live by God's Word and not needing to have that as a foundation. It's a terrible way to live," says Terry. "It's such a joy and such a blessing to really understand being set free."

She continues, "We know how precious this treasure is. It's one for which we give thanks to God every day for having brought us here. It's all God's work."

*Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ.*

*Do you have a story to share about how you became a WELS member? Send it to Forward in Christ, 2929 N. Mayfair Rd., Milwaukee WI 53222; [fi@sob.wels.net](mailto:fi@sob.wels.net).*



# Love grows DEEPER

A couple married for 58 years shares how with Christ their love only grows deeper.

Laura C. Schaefer

**S**ince August! You're pups, yet," Pastor Robert Voss said of my husband and me after inquiring how long we had been married. As we walked through the Voss' home, the many photos of their family and travels evidenced the length and richness of their married life. "Mature love is every bit as exciting as young love," he shares. "It changes, of course, from the very beginning when you're madly, madly in love. . . . Later you're madly in love in a different way."

The key to Bob and Carol Voss' happy marriage of 58 years? "She is a child of God. I am a child of God," says Bob. "We both know what that means. It is our joy. It is our strength in time of weakness. It is our help when we have troubles. It's our hope for life. We live that every day."

## The beginning of marital bliss

The Lord certainly meant for their lives to be intertwined. When they first met, Bob, in his second year at

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, was taking a nap when Carol walked in. She thought, "How can that young man sleep so much?" and found out later when she heard him snore through many a storm and their babies' crying.

"I thought she was a very attractive young lady with beautiful brown eyes," Bob recalls. "She was a gal who was witty and of good humor." Carol confesses, "I always wanted to go with a man who had blonde hair and blue eyes. He had some smarts about him too." Above all, they realized that it was the Lord who had given them a common faith, who drew them together.

"June 24, 1951, was the beginning of our marital bliss—most of the time," Carol shares. "It isn't always bliss, you see. Sometimes it's hard work." One lesson Carol wishes she had known as a newlywed is not to laugh at her spouse's pooh-poohs. "By that I mean

things the other does differently or says or doesn't do," she explains. Take the time that Bob misspoke from the pulpit about the harlots, sinners, and republicans. "I know it's not polite to laugh," Carol says to Bob, "although you did laugh at my first baked beans. They smelled great, but they were like bullets!"

While Bob and Carol have had the common disagreement about which way the toilet paper should spin off the roll, they know it is vital to work through differences with open communication. "If you have a disagreement or you do not understand each other,





you have to talk that out right away rather than build it up," Carol reflects. "And you have to give in sometimes. You both do."

### The busy years

Through six calls and three cities during Bob's 43 years in the ministry, the couple learned to serve the Lord and each other. "I appreciate that she is a strong person—a good, strong Christian woman who inspires me, still, every day," says Bob.

Their first two children were born when Bob was serving at Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis., in the 1950s. Four years later he was called to Siloah, Milwaukee, where, after just six months, the head pastor passed away, leaving Bob with the weight of a large congregation on his shoulders. "Carol really had to be the tower of strength with the children while I served as advisor," Bob remembers, especially since three more children came along during these years. "Sure, the children could be a chore sometimes," Carol acknowledges, "but that's when we had to get together and decide what

we were going to do and how we were going to do it."

The couple spent the next 24 years of ministry and marriage in Milwaukee, with Bob serving in high-level synodical positions. When their youngest was in third grade, Carol began teaching developmentally disabled children in the Milwaukee public school system. "With my work and Carol teaching, it was a very, very busy time of life. We both had pressures," Bob recalls. "But it was also a time that was very good for us as husband and wife. We'd get away for a weekend, and Grandma and Grandpa would stay with the kids. Such a busy time can still be healthy if you use your time properly and remember to reinvigorate your love. We did that."

Bob and Carol knew that the most important thing they could do for their marriage and family was to stay firmly grounded in the truth of God's Word. "As the kids got older and were involved in sports and activities, scheduling family devotions became difficult," Carol says. "One thing that was never optional was going to church, even if they were out late on a Saturday night."

### Through sickness and loss

The Lord also provided strength during times of sickness and loss. In 1957, the couple faced their first bout of serious illness. Bob had ulcerative colitis, and it suddenly became severe. The doctor's words are still clear in Bob's memory: "You will not see the light of day tomorrow if we don't operate tonight." Bob spent more than 100 days in the hospital. "He was so sick," Carol recalls. "Now these past few years he's had a bout with cancer. It's kind of amazing that he's lasted this long," she says with a smile. "And I'm very grateful to the Lord for that."

Death has not been a stranger to the Voss family either. The couple

dealt with the death of Carol's brother in World War II. They lost Bob's two sisters at ages 28 and 50. The most difficult loss, however, was their 15-year-old granddaughter, Lisa. "I really can't imagine our marriage without God as the third strand," Carol ponders, "especially with Lisa's death. I don't know how we'd have made it through without the hope of seeing her again at the resurrection."

### Love deepened in retirement

Now in retirement, Bob and Carol continue to grow together in faith, looking forward to the highlight of each day—devotions with just the two of them.

Their retirement started out much busier. When Bob retired in 1993, he received a call to do mission work in Russia. "I was sure that everyone worried I would be a nuisance, so they sent me off to Siberia," he jokes. They agree that their year in Russia was the best year of their life. "As Americans in Siberia just after the collapse of communism, we were certainly the minority," Bob explains. "Our love really grew because we were alone with each other."

"When a young person sees a couple married 58 years like us, it seems like a long, long time. But when we look back, we think, 'How did the time go so fast?'" says Bob. "The older you get, bodies become broken down—they get older. But to us, they are more beautiful. We don't hesitate to talk about dying. We've planned our funerals. It doesn't seem morbid at all to us. It just seems like the loving thing to do."

"With Christ in a marriage and home, love always grows deeper. It is not superficial in any way. It just grows deeper and deeper and deeper."

*Laura Schaefer is a staff writer for Forward in Christ.*



Bob and Carol Voss on their 40th wedding anniversary in 1991 and on their wedding day in 1951.



# WHATEVER

## Beautiful song

A hymn helps a teen deal with her grandfather's death.

Kaylie Duffy

Choir has always been a favorite class of mine. I am not a great singer, but singing makes me happy.

**On a cold winter day in January, while I was singing in choir, my principal interrupted me.** He politely asked me to follow him to the school office. My body froze. I quickly racked my brain for any stupid mistakes I could have made, but nothing came to mind.

"Don't worry, Kaylie. You aren't in any trouble," he said. "Your mom is waiting in the office to see you."

Relief flooded through me. Then, suddenly, my mind comprehended what he had just said. My mom was in the school office? She worked 20 minutes away. Why would she drive all the way to my school?

I looked up into my principal's face. "Do you know why my mom is here?"

He hesitated for a moment and said, "Umm . . . I think your mom better explain."

That one sentence made my stomach turn upside down. Horrible images flashed through my head. As we rounded the corner to the school office, I saw my sister walking out. I gave her a questioning look. As she walked past me, she whispered two words.

"Grandpa's dead."

*Wait*, I wanted to scream out. I must have heard her wrong. I ran to catch up to her. "What did you say?" I asked her.

"Grandpa's dead," she said for the second time. "He's gone."

This couldn't be the grandpa that I knew. My grandpa was strong and healthy. I had just seen him at Christmas, and he was as joyful as ever.

My mom was an absolute wreck. Her face was red and blotchy, and tears were running down her face. I started saying everything a faithful Christian should say: Grandpa was in heaven

now, and we should be happy for him. But I don't even know if I half-believed what I was saying myself. I hated to see my mother cry so helplessly. We left immediately to see my grandma and help with funeral arrangements.

**The rest of that week went by in a blur of flowers, caskets, and crying.** I could see how strong my grandma was trying to be, but I knew she was putting on a brave face. She had just lost the man she had loved and lived with for more than five decades.

The night before the funeral, I sat in my grandmother's living room, looking through the family pictures. I came across a wonderful picture of my grandpa at his wedding. A huge grin consumed his face. A smile crept into the corners of my mouth, but I hastily replaced it with a grimace. I missed him. No more bear hugs. No more kisses. Just nothing.

The next day was the funeral. I listened as the pastor spoke, but I wasn't all there. Sure, I followed along in my Bible during the readings, but I wasn't truly participating. I still didn't want to believe my grandfather was gone.

Then the pastor announced the last hymn, "On Eagles' Wings." I lost it. I had tried so hard to keep a smooth composure. A tear ran down my face as I sobbed the last verse and refrain: "And he will raise you up on eagles' wings, Bear you on the breath of dawn, Make you to shine like the sun, And hold you in the palm of his hand."

Then I smiled. Why was I sad? Grandpa was with Jesus.

Kaylie Duffy, a sophomore at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at Bethany, Fort Atkinson.





## Obituaries

**Delbert F. Ehleke**  
1937-2009

Delbert Ehleke was born April 25, 1937. He died March 10, 2009.

A 1959 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Christ-St. John, West Salem, Wis.; and St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.

He is preceded in death by one brother and one grandchild. He is survived by his wife, Cheryl; one son; two daughters; eight grandchildren; and two brothers.

**Robbin G. Tisdale**  
1945-2009

Robbin Tisdale was born Dec. 10, 1945. He died March 10, 2009.

He served as pastor at Bethany, Gibsonsia, Pa.; and Our Savior, Hollidaysburg, Pa.

He is preceded in death by his father. He is survived by his wife, Judith; two sons; three daughters; his mother; six grandchildren; and two brothers.

**Gene Arthur Gronholz**  
1937-2009

Gene Gronholz was born July 14, 1937, in New Ulm, Minn. He died March 16, 2009, in Jefferson, Wis.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. Peter, Weyauwega, Wis.; Zion, Columbus, Wis.; and West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.

He is preceded in death by a sister. He is survived by his wife, Carol; three sons; five grandchildren; one great-grandchild; and three brothers.

**Curtis James Mantey**  
1950-2009

Curtis Mantey was born July 7, 1950, in Norfolk, Neb. He died March 21, 2009, in Port Orchard, Wash.

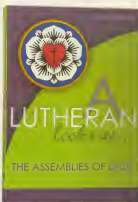
A 1972 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Zion, Moberg, S.D.; St. John, St. John's, Antigua; Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.; and Bethany, Port Orchard, Wash.

He is preceded in death by his father; three grandchildren; and one brother. He is survived by his wife, Barb; 1 son; 5 daughters; his mother; 11 grandchildren; and 2 sisters.



A look at new books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit [www.nph.net](http://www.nph.net) or call 800-662-6022. Note: These reviews are not meant to represent the opinions of WELS or Forward in Christ.

### The Assemblies of God



\$12.99

In a world inundated with different Christian denominations, the true believer in Jesus Christ must not only be wary but well informed of the doctrinal positions held by the various church bodies who are our church neighbors.

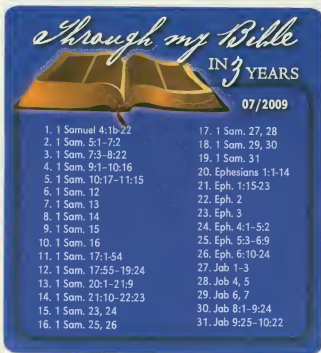
In *A Lutheran Looks at the Assemblies of God*, the author presents a well-researched overview of the beliefs and practices of the Assemblies of God. Pastor Feuerstahler sets the tone of the book with a well-documented history of the Assemblies of God from its conception to the present. The reader is then taken through the church body's 16 doctrinal statements. Each statement is analyzed from a Lutheran perspective, supported with proof texts from the Holy Scriptures.

Within the Assemblies of God's doctrinal statements lie a few teachings that overwhelm all others: the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. The book brings these points out very well and explains how these points of doctrine drive the church body. The book shines a bright light not only on this false theology of the Pentecostal churches but indirectly on other denominations who are also adopting these same teachings.

Although I found the book to be very informative and fair, I felt the author was a little too zealous in finding points of contention with the Assemblies of God on matters with which the author confessed agreement. I also felt the author left a small amount of confusion regarding his statements on "subjective experience" and "objective truth," since every Christian experiences a subjective relationship with God (as in Psalm 23). I felt as if the book should have elaborated on what the Lutheran perspective is on objective truth for the sake of clarification.

Still, the book is very well researched and written. I would strongly recommend the book to every Lutheran because of the pervasiveness of this doctrinal flavor in today's world.

Jack Callaway  
Strafford, Missouri



- |                        |                      |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. 1 Samuel 4:16-22    | 17. 1 Sam. 27, 28    |
| 2. 1 Sam. 5:1-72       | 18. 1 Sam. 29, 30    |
| 3. 1 Sam. 7:3-8:22     | 19. 1 Sam. 31        |
| 4. 1 Sam. 9:1-10:16    | 20. Ephesians 1:1-14 |
| 5. 1 Sam. 10:17-11:15  | 21. Eph. 1:15-23     |
| 6. 1 Sam. 12           | 22. Eph. 2           |
| 7. 1 Sam. 13           | 23. Eph. 3           |
| 8. 1 Sam. 14           | 24. Eph. 4:1-5:2     |
| 9. 1 Sam. 15           | 25. Eph. 5:3-6:9     |
| 10. 1 Sam. 16          | 26. Eph. 6:10-24     |
| 11. 1 Sam. 17:1-54     | 27. Job 1-3          |
| 12. 1 Sam. 17:55-19:24 | 28. Job 4, 5         |
| 13. 1 Sam. 20:1-21:9   | 29. Job 6, 7         |
| 14. 1 Sam. 21:10-22:23 | 30. Job 8:1-9:24     |
| 15. 1 Sam. 23, 24      | 31. Job 9:25-10:22   |
| 16. 1 Sam. 25, 26      |                      |



## Farewell and Godspeed

"Go in peace, confident that your Lord will be with you," said Pastor Paul Ziemer, WELS civilian chaplain to the military, on April 26 at Trinity, El Paso, Tex.

Ziemer was concluding the "Farewell and Godspeed" rite used by WELS Military Services. The April 26 worship service was designed for members of Wisconsin's 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, who were heading overseas for active duty later that week.

These members of Wisconsin's National Guard had been training at Fort Bliss in Texas. While there, servicemen and women worshiped at Trinity, El Paso. Master Sergeant Andrew Phelps, a member at St. Matthew, Janesville, Wis., helped coordinate these trips to Trinity.

"Pastor Caauwe and the entire Trinity congregation were absolutely wonderful in every respect," notes Phelps. "The first Sunday I attended alone and was immediately welcomed and felt very comfortable. As time went by, word spread, and we had

perhaps 20 or so soldiers attending. It was very warming to be able to worship together. Although each of us is planning on spending time in Iraq, with any challenges and risks we will encounter, the reassurance that Christ is in control melts the fears."

Sergeant First Class Sherri O'Neal, a member at St. John, Waterloo, Wis., adds, "The church was a very welcome one and made me feel a little closer to home."

Johann Caauwe, pastor at Trinity, says that 27 members of the 32nd—16 of those current WELS members—attended Trinity in the weeks leading up to their deployment. "I appreciated the opportunity to serve these men and women. Even though I only saw them for a few weeks, their names and faces will remain with me for some time as I remember them and their families in my own prayers."

More than 40 WELS members are part of the 32nd Infantry Brigade. WELS Military Services has been working to identify these members so

that it can minister to them while they are overseas. As Mark Vance, programs and communication director for the Military Services Committee, explains, "The military will grant us access to our troops overseas, but they need a detailed list of which people we want to see and where they are stationed."

As for Phelps, he says, "I am looking forward to a visit from Pastor Ziemer, complete with helmet and body armor."

*If you or someone you know is being called to active duty, fill out a military referral form at [www.wels.net/jump/referral](http://www.wels.net/jump/referral).*

### An American hero

"My four-year-old son, Andrew, is enthralled with soldiers," says Johann Caauwe, pastor at Trinity, El Paso, Tex. "He has been in his element to see all the soldiers at church."

That respect for soldiers only deepened when Master Sergeant Andrew Phelps reached down and gave little Andrew the 32nd Brigade Red Arrow patch from his uniform following the Military Services worship service at Trinity on April 26.

"We Andrews need to stick together," said Phelps.



Master Sergeant Andrew Phelps and Andrew Caauwe



Members of Wisconsin's 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team worshiped at Trinity, El Paso, Tex., during their training at Fort Bliss, Tex., for active duty in Iraq.



## Moving hearts in Minnesota

"Every time the pressure gets too hard or school gets overwhelming, I just grab a few tracts, go knocking on doors, and look for opportunities to share the Word. I use it as my little therapy session. . . . It's the most rewarding thing; if you find even one or two people with open ears, you get to witness to them. The whole experience is just beautiful."

Those are the words of Rodrigo Concha, director of Hispanic outreach in southeast Minnesota and 2009 graduate of Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. For the past three years, Concha—a second career, pre-seminary student originally from Chile—has been meeting one-on-one with Hispanic families in the region and introducing them to the gospel. He is also working with four largely Anglo congregations to help them reach out to their Spanish-speaking neighbors.

Before Concha came on board, St. John, Glencoe; St. Peter, St. Peter; St. Paul, St. James; and St. John, Sleepy Eye, had been working with their local chapter of WELS Kingdom Workers to get a summer vicar to help with Hispanic outreach in the region. Although the canvassing and vacation Bible school seemed to be working well, Concha thought something was missing.

"I saw the need to have more than just doing vacation Bible school and then goodbye until next summer; I thought the work was getting lost in the middle," says Concha. "And I started getting into peoples' ears. I told them that they should have somebody [working the rest of the year], never thinking that somebody was going to be me."

Concha was asked to be the director on a part-time basis. With WELS Kingdom Workers providing funding for his position, he is now able to spend 20 hours each week visiting Hispanic families in the four towns and doing friendship evangelism.

"I help with their earthly needs," says Concha. "If they need a consultation to a doctor or need to talk about their chil-

dren having problems in school, I will do anything that will help them."

After he helps with their earthly needs, Concha says he introduces why he does it. "A lot of times I get the question, 'Okay, what do I owe you?' And I say, 'Nothing. Salvation from Christ is free, so everything I do for you is free.' And that brings up the question, 'What's all this about free salvation?' It works well to start the conversation."

saw what was happening in their community and saw the possibility of what could be done," Concha says.

St. Paul now hosts an activity or event almost every month, which has been bringing people into the church and children into the school. A driving force behind these efforts is the congregation members; Concha says they are very involved and dedicated. "It has been an inspiration," he says.



Children attend a vacation Bible school at St. Paul, St. James, Minn. Hosting community events is just one way congregations in the area are reaching out to their Spanish-speaking neighbors.

Concha says many people are interested in learning more, and he ends up doing Bible studies and devotions with them. He has even been able to refer families to the local pastors for baptisms, marriages, and funerals.

Although these church visitors don't always translate into new members—especially since the Hispanic population is very mobile—the congregations in the area are working to make families feel welcome.

St. Paul in St. James, for example, is a congregation that Concha says is "on fire" for outreach. In recent years, the small town's population has changed; now one-third of its residents are Hispanic. "The [congregation members]

"The Word not only works on new people, but also on the members that have heard it over and over."

As Concha prepares for the next step of his theological education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, the congregations will continue to utilize summer vicars, rely on volunteers, and look for other ways to carry out the work Concha has been doing. Even if another year-round replacement is not found, Concha says God's Word will continue to move people's hearts. "The Lord is working some beautiful things here," he says. "And the beauty of evangelism is you don't need to change people; the Holy Spirit does that and will continue to do that."



## Q&A with Danny Wehmeyer, member of the Ad Hoc Commission

*The Ad Hoc Commission was authorized by the 2007 synod convention to analyze the way the synod works and to propose comprehensive, long-term strategies to help the synod carry out its mission. Forward in Christ sat down with commission member Danny Wehmeyer to find out about the Ministry Direction committee's recommendations about called worker education and a synodwide doctrinal study.*

**Question** – What were the main thoughts about continuing education for called workers?

**Answer** – We realize that as wonderful as our education is at the college and seminary level, they don't teach you everything you need to get through life. They teach you enough to get out there and get going. So instead of just saying everyone needs continuing education, let's give them a framework to work in. It's meant more to encourage—not to enforce. To say, "Look, it's a good thing to do continuing education."

**Question** – Is this thought different than what was thought in the past?

**Answer** – I don't think this is new, but I do think it's keeping it in front of people. The college and the seminary have been doing forms of continuing education for a long time. I just think they could be better utilized. Also, it's not just a matter of going to Summer Quarter or going back to Martin Luther College. You can go downtown and take a career course in time management or administrative skills or other things that you need.

**Question** – What about the cost of ministerial education?

**Answer** – There is concern that each year as our students graduate either from MLC or the seminary, their debt is more and more. . . . Part of this is just because the cost of education has gotten higher. We're saying, if you're frugal, you work hard, you have a job, and you're still coming out with a big debt, then we as a church body want to make it a priority to help you.

**Question** – Is the idea to keep tuition lower or provide more scholarships?

**Answer** – All of the above. It's a mixture of scholarships but also fellowships at the seminary for guys who have special gifts in music or whatever. We didn't want to limit.

We also looked in terms of if we can reduce the overall tuition or cost. The discussion was: Is it better to cut it up front or to say we will give you rebates for each year that you are in the ministry? There was not full agreement in the Ad Hoc Commission on how to do this. We're going to let the voters decide.

**Question** – So what exactly is the synodwide study?

**Answer** – Certain issues seem to come up over and over within the synod, and we thought maybe a broad framework [of topics to discuss] would be good, instead of everyone studying different things.

**Question** – What are the areas that the commission is recommending be studied?

**Answer** – The first is the efficacy on the means of grace. We have some people who say, "I preach the gospel, that's it. I don't need to do more." We might say, "But let's talk about what grace really means. Is this a pass to not do anything other than stand up on Sunday and preach the gospel and sit down and think the Holy Spirit will handle all of it after that?" We need to keep on working. How can we plan and promote and seize opportunities to share God's Word, while trusting the gospel?

In year two it's vocation or church and ministry. We are all Christians. We're all equal in status before God, even in our different roles. . . . Luther says if I am a shoe cobbler, be the best shoe cobbler I can be. Love my family, take care of them, and teach them God's Word—that's what I need to do. My nephew is struggling right now. I said, "Whatever you do, just be a beacon for God in a dark world out there."

Year three is the care of souls. Everyone needs to understand that there is so much healing in the gospel. Let's make

sure that people have that available.

Year four is the sacramental life. The means of grace are the center of our Christian life. Forget the building, forget the pomp, the circumstance. The Word and the sacraments are our focus.

**Question** – What will this study accomplish?

**Answer** – By doing a synodwide study we can get real discussion and understanding that we are together on all these things. Let's just stop arguing and sit down and discuss these ideas. Maybe then, and this is my personal opinion, we can spend more time loving one another and practicing the Great Commission.

View the entire Ad Hoc report online at [www.wels.net/jump/adhoc](http://www.wels.net/jump/adhoc). Read more about the purpose of the synod, a preamble to the Ad Hoc report, on p. 28.



Danny Wehmeyer



## Clinic offers opportunities to witness

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms," our God tells us in 1 Peter 4:10. In this spirit, the Granville Neighborhood Health Center had its beginning. As Pastor Ken Fisher of Risen Savior, Milwaukee (Granville community), Wis., puts it: "God brought people together who shared a common passion for showing Christ's love to others and putting their unique gifts to work."

A collaboration between Risen Savior and Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC), Milwaukee, the center works "to provide free health care services, out of Christian compassion, to the people of the Granville community who are uninsured."

The idea for the clinic began when Risen Savior member Margo Ulrich, who directs the congregation's pregnancy counseling center, learned of the difficulty neighborhood residents had in obtaining proper health care, because they lacked insurance. With encouragement from Fisher, she began to pursue the idea of a clinic. Meanwhile, Rebekah Carey, head of WLC's nursing program, asked Risen Savior if WLC students could assess their school's children as part of the pediatric clinical rotation.

A connection was made, and the first official brainstorming session was held in December 2007. Community leaders from all interested parties—including an alderman and state senator, major donors, African-American health care leaders, and community partners—attended.

After much planning, the Granville Neighborhood Health Center opened on April 25, 2009. Located in Risen Savior's school gymnasium, the clinic is accessible, secure, and linked to the church and school. Open one Saturday a month, the center provides screenings for blood pressure, blood glucose, and depression; school and flu immunizations; management of minor illnesses;

and management of high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol.

The center not only serves as a clinical rotation site for nursing students but also provides volunteer opportunities for all WLC students and members of Risen Savior or other WELS congregations.

"Overall, we have been abundantly blessed," Carey reflects, "and the good Lord has opened doors in ways we never imagined possible! Funding will always be a challenge, but the Lord has provided thus far. Volunteers have stepped up all over the place, and we hope and pray that continues."

"Our ultimate goal is to give WELS people an opportunity to witness to the community through their words and actions," Fisher shares. "I have had many nurses and health care professionals explain to me how excited they are to be able to put their gifts to work and actually tell people about Christ as they are doing it."

*To learn more or to volunteer, contact Melissa Wolfgram, 414-354-7320; granvillehealthcenter@hotmail.com.*



Risen Savior's parish nurse Renee Baxman weighs a child at the grand opening of the Granville Neighborhood Health Center, Milwaukee, in April.

## Members affected by flooding

Two rounds of river flooding in North Dakota and Minnesota affected members from three congregations in March and April.

First, some members of Ascension, Moorhead, Minn., and Shepherd of the Valley, West Fargo, N.D., had to evacuate from their homes and deal with water damage after the Red River crested at a record 40.82 ft. in late March, causing widespread flooding. Both churches were spared because of their locations away from the flood zone on the river.

According to Pastor David Bitter from Shepherd of the Valley, flooding is common in this area, but this was the worst the region has seen. The National Guard and community volunteers—including members from Shepherd of the Valley and Ascension—filled more than 3 million sandbags, using them to build and fortify dikes.

"It's been really neat to see how people are getting together and helping each other," says Bitter. "I sandbagged at some members' houses but also just wherever I was sent. It doesn't matter who they are; you just want to help them."

In mid-April, 40 to 50 members of St. Paul's, Valley City, N.D.—including St. Paul's pastor Newt Trimmer and his family—had to evacuate the community because of a backed-up sewer system. The sewer system was damaged by the heavy machinery brought in to shore up dikes in the area to prevent flooding from the Sheyenne River.

WELS Committee on Relief has granted money to each of these congregations to help with cleanup work in those areas.

"I had many phone calls . . . from people all around the country saying that we have been included in their prayers. We're thankful for that and thankful that the Lord has answered those prayers," says Bitter. "We continue to trust that he will take care of us."



## Program works to help schools in transition —

To help strengthen schools, especially those with a changing ministry climate, is the goal of Second Wind, a new consulting program offered by WELS Parish Assistance and Forward with Lutheran Schools.

"The idea of Second Wind is to focus on several critical issues [in a school], to go to work on those issues, and to help make the school as strong as it can be," says Greg Schmill, a school consultant and developer of the program.

Schmill developed Second Wind in 2007, modeling it after a program in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It begins by a participating school filling out a survey identifying its critical issues. Schmill then assembles a consulting team with experience in those issues, and an intensive three-day consulting session with school leaders and parents follows.

In 2008, Schmill received a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans to pilot the program in four schools. Our Savior Lutheran School, Grafton, Wis., was the first school to participate.

The ministry at Our Savior was changing. The congregation had decided to add a gymnasium, classrooms, and offices to the school's building in 2008. According to Joel Grulke, principal of Our Savior, this addition would present many new opportunities for outreach as well as outreach in the community.

"It was great to have some very experienced gentlemen come in from outside and give an objective, unbiased, independent look at what we were doing and what we were getting into with having a new building," says Grulke.

Starting before- and after-school programs and developing more extensive outreach efforts were just two of the recommendations Our Savior received from the Second Wind consultants, recommendations that the congregation is pursuing.

"It helped to bring a focus to our future ministry direction and gave us a list of improvement objectives that, Lord willing, will help our school reach the greatest potential that we have for gospel ministry," says Grulke.

Schmill's original goal with the program was to help schools that were struggling, but it was determined that the program also would be helpful for any school in transition, such as Our Savior.

"Schools need and can benefit from an outside perspective, from support, and from accountability," says Schmill. "My prayer is that Second Wind can meet the needs of more WELS schools in the future."

To learn more about Second Wind, contact Greg Schmill, 920-638-1741; greg.schmill@sab.wels.net.

## Let your light shine



*Tiphany Wiley, a 2008 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran College and member at Calvary, Chandler, Ariz., traveled to Taichung, Taiwan, last August, to serve as a WELS Kingdom Workers' volunteer. While in Taiwan, she and fellow volunteer Jenna Graebert are teaching English classes at the church to adults, teens, and children. Here Tiphany shares some lessons that she is learning.*

"Why did you choose to go so far away from your home to Taiwan? Don't you miss home?"

I cannot count the number of times I've been asked this question. Sometimes I thought, "Why am I here?" I'm certain everyone has thought this at one point in their lives. If not, I guarantee the question will arise.

Before I continue, I must address a very important part of my life—my cultural background. I have grown up both on and off the San Carlos Apache reservation. During my life I have been blessed to be influenced by different people, many of which carried the light of Christ in their lives. These people—my grandmother especially—have influenced my life along the years and have given me the desire and motivation to let my light shine—especially with those who walk in darkness.

I return to the original question, why would anyone choose to live in a foreign land? What's my motivation? There's an elderly man in one of my classrooms, and he had never heard about the Bible. He's always full of "why" questions before, after, and during our lessons. His questions are so penetrating at times that I find myself thinking, "Why am I here? I'm not equipped for these kind of questions." Nevertheless, these questions are welcomed.

One day, after many prayers and a lesson about how God feels when bad things happen, this man said something that I will never forget. Rather than asking me a profound question, he said, "Wow! God is great!" I couldn't believe it! We only have class once a week, and he's only been to three classes! No words can explain what joy I felt for him. He was truly walking in darkness without the light that we Christians at times take for granted.

It's amazing to share this experience. We are only sowers of seeds. Our work requires patience and time in order to produce fruit. We don't make the green plants grow. God does! I believe I can now say I know what it feels like to be the person that says, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost coin!"

At times we ask, "Why? Why now? Why me?" We really should be saying, "I'm listening, Jesus. Use me as you wish. Not my will but your will be done."



Tiphany Wiley (center) and one of her adult English classes at Christmastime.



## District news

### Arizona-California

The Springs Lutheran Church, Spanish Springs, Nev., held its first Sunday worship service on April 5. Located in a growing area outside of Reno, this home mission congregation was established as a partnership between Shepherd of the Mountains, an established WELS congregation in Reno, and WELS Board for Home Missions. Rev. Steve Hillmer, pastor at The Springs since July 2008, reports that 83 people attended Sunday's service, 45 of whom were visitors from the community.

### Minnesota

Ninety Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., students spent their spring break traveling to WELS congregations as part of MLC's Daylight USA program. These students canvassed, helped with children's outreach programs, and assisted the congregations in many other ministry opportunities. These mission trips were funded by WELS Kingdom Workers.

### Northern Wisconsin

On April 19, The Core, Appleton, Wis., held its first official service. The Core,

an outreach ministry of St. Peter, Freedom, Wis., targets the 18- to 35-year-old age group, but visitors of all ages attend its services.

### Dakota-Montana

Graduates of Northwestern Lutheran Academy (NLA), Mobridge, S.D., were honored on March 22 at Great Plains Lutheran High School (GPLHS), Watertown, S.D. Northwestern Lutheran Academy closed 30 years ago, but this event, titled "See the glow of NLA at GPLHS," expressed appreciation for the blessings that graduates of Northwestern Lutheran Academy have poured out on Great Plains Lutheran High School.

### Western Wisconsin

On April 26, members of Peace, Janesville, Wis., celebrated the rededication of their worship facility after an extensive renovation to the sanctuary and upper level of the facility.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ—Frederick Cosmer; DM—Wayne Rause; MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bavee; NW—Joel Lilla; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

### Michigan



Good Shepherd, Alma, Mich., held its first Winter Carnival. More than 250 people from the community enjoyed a night of games and prizes with proceeds benefiting the local Red Cross. This is one in a series of yearly community awareness and outreach events sponsored by Good Shepherd.

### Southeastern Wisconsin



Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., hosted the WELS National Band Festival on March 13-15. The festival brought together 125 students from 22 WELS high schools.

### de·fin·ing re·li·gion

Calvinism

The developed teachings or theological system of the reformer Jahn Calvin (1509–1564) as presented in the various Reformed confessions of the 16th and 17th centuries. The teachings are briefly summarized with the acrostic T.U.L.I.P.—Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance of the saints.



## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

## Pastors

Frenz Jr., Arthur H., to retirement  
 Geiger, Michael G., to Good Shepherd, Burnsville, Minn.  
 Gurgel, Karl R., to Holy Word, Austin, Tex.  
 Kuske, John D., to Christ the Redeemer, Borre, Vt.  
 Kuske, Norman C., to retirement  
 Leach, Jonathan T., to St. Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, Minn.  
 Quandt, Rager S., to St. Paul, Broken Bow, Neb.  
 Sengbusch, Carroll G., to retirement  
 Stammann, Joshua E., to Solem, Scottsdale, Ariz.  
 Strand, James C., to St. Paul, Bloomer, Wis.

## Teachers

Bater, Charlotte A., to retirement  
 Buch, Kevin M., to Monticowoc Lutheran High School, Monticowoc, Wis.  
 Cax, Rebecca L., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.  
 Drkula, Larelei, to St. John, St. Paul, Minn.  
 Durst, Deborah J., to retirement  
 Ehke, Kimberly A., to Trinity, Coledonia, Wis.  
 Enersan, Paulette, to Trinity, Osceola, Wis.  
 Enstad, Megan, to Lakewood, Lakewood, Wash.  
 Fischer, Marcia J., to retirement  
 Grass, Beth, to Zion, Hortland, Wis.  
 Jeffers, Brenda L., to Cross of Glory, Peorio, Ariz.  
 Kaeller, Daris A., to retirement  
 Karte, Jean L., to retirement  
 Needham, Douglas W., to retirement  
 Putnam, Bannie L., to retirement  
 Rutenberg, Ann M., to retirement  
 Rude, Larry A., to Mt. Olive, Monkota, Minn.  
 Schmelzer, Mary E., to retirement  
 Schmidt, Michelle M., to Foith, Fond du Lac, Wis.  
 Schultz, Delyte J., to retirement  
 Schultz, Raseann L., to retirement  
 Tackebury, Lais M., to retirement  
 Waghe, Beth M., to retirement  
 Westphal, Leray E., to retirement  
 Wiedmann, Celeste K., to retirement

## ANNIVERSARIES

Milwaukee, Wis.—Christ (125). June 14.  
 Charles Bonow concert, 10 A.M. June 21.  
 Anniversary worship, 10 A.M.; dinner to follow. Joel Joeger, 414-645-5138.  
 Raymond, S.D.—Bethlehem (125). June 21. Worship, 10:45 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 605-532-3766; pheosont@itctel.com.

Grant Park, Ill.—St. Paul (140). July 12. Worship, 9:45 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. Worship, 3 P.M.; refreshments to follow. Web site, [www.stpaulgrantpark.net](http://www.stpaulgrantpark.net).  
 Newburg, Wis.—St. John (150). July 12. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; presentation between services and meal following the second service. 262-675-6640.  
 Valentine, Neb.—Zion (75). July 18. Worship, 11 A.M. & 5 P.M. Cherry County Fairgrounds. Meal at noon. July 19. Worship, 10 A.M. at Zion. Mott Krenke, [mskrenke@hotmail.com](mailto:mskrenke@hotmail.com).  
 Balaton, Minn.—St. Peter (125). July 19. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; catered meal to follow. Mark Zonder, 507-734-2309.

## COMING EVENTS

Woman's Day Retreat—June 5-7. St. Peter, St. Albert, Alberta, Canada. Theme: "I love to tell the story!" Modylin, 780-460-9977. Web site, [www.sointpeterlutheran.com](http://www.sointpeterlutheran.com).  
 Northwestern Publishing House music reading workshops—Cheryl Nolte, 800-662-6093 ext. 5763, 414-615-5763; [nolte@nph.wels.net](mailto:nolte@nph.wels.net). Web site, [www.nph.net/music/workshop](http://www.nph.net/music/workshop).  
 • June 13, Stor of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.  
 • June 20, St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.  
 • June 27, Trinity, Boy City, Mich.  
 • July 11, St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.  
 • July 12, St. Paul, Onoloko, Wis.  
 • Aug. 8, 9 A.M. Choral music only. NPH, Milwaukee, Wis.

Grand opening—The Gardens of Hartford, the newest WLCFS assisted living community in Hartford, Wis. June 13, 12-4 P.M. 414-322-1311. Web site, [www.TheGardensofHartford.com](http://www.TheGardensofHartford.com).

2009 WLCFS golf tournament—June 18. Brooklons Golf Club, North Prairie, Wis. Registration packets available. 888-685-9522, [info@wlcfs.org](mailto:info@wlcfs.org). Web site, [www.wlcfs.org](http://www.wlcfs.org).

Soul ride—June 20. Solem (107th), Milwaukee, Wis. Sponsored by WELS Lutherans for Life—Milwaukee Chapter and WELS Riders. 414-727-8176, [office@welsmilwaukee.com](mailto:office@welsmilwaukee.com). Web site, [www.welsmilwaukee.com](http://www.welsmilwaukee.com).

46th annual LWMS convention—June 25-28. Sheraton Denver Hotel, Denver, Colo. Hosted by the Rocky Mountain Circuit. Theme: "Mission with on altitude." Web site, [www.lwms.org](http://www.lwms.org).

2009 WELS International Youth Rally—July 8-11. Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. Theme: "Follow the path; lead the way." Web site, [www.welsyouthrally.net](http://www.welsyouthrally.net).

## Lutheran Pioneer Adventure Activities—

• July 12-18. 25th anniversary national camp at Camp ToPoWingo, Mishicot, Wis.  
 • Aug. 2-8. 350-mile bike trip, beginning at the Lutheran Pioneer Home Office, Burlington, Wis.

Dole Lorfeld, 262-534-5124; [lpexcedir@tds.net](mailto:lpexcedir@tds.net).  
 Operation Science Summer Teacher Training—July 22-23. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. [bethweed@operationscience.org](mailto:bethweed@operationscience.org). Web site, [www.operationscience.org](http://www.operationscience.org).

Martin Luther College reunion weekend—July 24-26. MLC, DMLC, and NWC alumni are encouraged to attend. Event schedule includes worship, alumni college, campus/church/community tours, and a banquet. Register online at [www.mlc-reunion09.eventbrite.com](http://www.mlc-reunion09.eventbrite.com). 877-652-1995 ext. 387. Web site, [www.mlc-wels.edu](http://www.mlc-wels.edu).

Christian Educators for Special Education Conference—Aug. 11, 8:30 A.M.-3 P.M. Klemmers, Milwaukee, Wis. Lunch included. [pleifer@peacehartford.org](mailto:pleifer@peacehartford.org).

WELS Church Librarian's Organization fall conference—Oct. 3, 9:30 A.M. Immanuel, Monticowoc, Wis. Betty or Howard Wilsmon, 920-682-5351; [jhbwilsmon511@sbglobal.net](mailto:jhbwilsmon511@sbglobal.net).

Martin Luther College Ladies Auxiliary annual meeting—Oct. 14. Registration, 9 A.M. Meeting, 9:30 A.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221. Web site, [www.mlc-wels.edu](http://www.mlc-wels.edu).

## NAMES WANTED

Children's church—If you are a WELS congregation conducting any form of "children's church" and/or offering a children's message during regular worship, please send a brief description of who you are and what you do to [cyd@sob.wels.net](mailto:cyd@sob.wels.net). We are trying to establish a database of congregations engaged in this kind of ministry to share with other WELS churches asking for ideas.

Pastors and missionaries traveling to Hawaii—guest quarters available free 30 minutes from the Kona International Airport on the island of Hawaii. Michiko Soto, 808-325-1035; [lucymichiko@netscope.net](mailto:lucymichiko@netscope.net).

Gronville Neighborhood Health Center, Milwaukee, Wis.—Volunteer opportunity for health care workers and others. Melissa Wolgrom, 414-354-7320; [gronvillehealthcenter@hotmail.com](mailto:gronvillehealthcenter@hotmail.com). Web site, [www.gronvilleneighborhoodhealthcenter.com](http://www.gronvilleneighborhoodhealthcenter.com).

## PREACHER NEEDED

Olympia, Wash.—Messiah is looking for a pastor to preach Aug. 9, 16, and 23, in exchange for the use of a home in the area. Joel Nitz, 360-923-1961; [reviver@juno.com](mailto:reviver@juno.com).

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; [bulletinboard@sob.wels.net](mailto:bulletinboard@sob.wels.net). Deadline is eight weeks before publication date. View an updated bulletin board at [www.wels.net/jump/bulletinboard](http://www.wels.net/jump/bulletinboard) and a calendar at [www.wels.net/jump/calendar](http://www.wels.net/jump/calendar).



## Picture this



Thought I'd send a picture to help warm things up a bit in the Midwest! Springtime starts early in the tropics of Taiwan. This was taken in February 2009. The early Portuguese explorers called Taiwan *Illa Formosa* or "Beautiful Island." The yellow flowers are vegetable oil flowers, which are eventually tilled into the ground as a natural fertilizer.

*Submitted by Kevin Stellick, missionary in Taiwan*

Send pictures to Picture This, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; [pic@sab.wels.net](mailto:pic@sab.wels.net). On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.

## OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES

I wasn't able to go to church with my family so I asked my four-year-old son, Joel, to tell me what he had learned in Sunday school. After thinking for a moment, he told me he had learned about Zacchaeus. Then I asked him which pastor was up front in church that morning. With some exasperation, Joel replied, "Mom, there were too many tall people in front of me so I couldn't see." After a little more thought, he continued, "I was kind of like Zacchaeus, except there weren't any trees in church for me to climb!"

*Sue Heinritz, Citrus Heights, California*







# Connected a

Congregations working together can accomplish tasks that are

**Why do we need a synod?** Perhaps that's not a question that comes up in everyday conversation, at least for most people in the pew. Some may not even know what a synod is, which synod their congregation belongs to, or what a synod is supposed to do. For some, however, the question is important.

We might wonder what is so important about a synod that we are asked to set aside a portion of our income for the synod's work. For some congregations, more than a little discussion might be attached to the question of how much they will commit from their budget for the synod. Local needs already stretch the congregation's budget. Why send money to the synod?

Sometimes the synod might seem to be like the local, state, or federal government asking for more tax revenue. Of course, at least one big difference separates the synod from any governmental agency. Taxes are required. If you don't pay them, consequences follow: penalties, legal trouble, or worse. Contributions to the local church and to the synod are voluntary. If you don't make contributions, consequences also follow. But the consequences are most often less ministry.

## **Believers gather to form local congregations**

We know what a local congregation is. It's a gathering of believers, usually in a specific location. These believers share the gospel with their community, teach members both young and old, worship, own property, and call public ministers of the gospel. The congregation requires the financial resources of its members so that it can pay the bills. Simple, right?

Each congregation is an independent group and conducts its ministry as it deems best. The Holy Spirit has drawn believers together, and they have adopted a common confession of their beliefs. Most congregational constitutions identify the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions as the basis of the congregation's beliefs.

Drawn together, members celebrate their unity of faith. They worship together, receive Holy Communion together, and work together to teach and witness to others. That's fellowship as God described it.

While each congregation is an independent group of believers conducting its own ministry, it is not alone. The Holy Spirit has drawn believers together in other locations in the same city, in cities across the country, and thousands of miles away in foreign countries. Some of those gatherings share the same beliefs. When they recognize one another as believers with a common faith, they celebrate that unity too. They have fellowship with one another. That's more than having coffee or social gatherings. They want to work together.

## **Congregations share the same beliefs**


Local congregations choose to align themselves with other congregations that share the same beliefs. Each congregation has the responsibility of doing the Lord's work, but when they come together, the gathering becomes a confederation or synod.

At least in our fellowship, it is not a hierarchy where the larger group controls or dictates to individual members. Congregations still are independent. The synod does not own the property of the local congregation or levy taxes or revenue. Neither does it force a congregation to adopt the common confession of the synod. Individual congregations voluntarily subscribe to the beliefs of the larger group. A congregation may withdraw from the group if it considers the confession no longer true to the Scriptures. On the other hand, the synod may suspend a congregation from membership if its confession is different from other congregations that form the synod.

## **Congregations work together in Christ**

So why form a synod of congregations that share the same beliefs? Because congregations want to work together, to find ways to do things that are more easily





# is a synod

difficult for individual congregations to do on their own.

done together than separately. That is the principle adopted by the last two conventions of the synod. The synod constitution provides some help identifying what is better done together than separately.

On one level, each individual Christian and each gathering of believers is to maintain the truth and avoid error. Christians gather together for mutual encouragement in God's truth. That's also part of the reason we are a synod. Yes, we can encourage one another in our individual congregations—even encourage other congregations nearby—but joined together as a synod we can maintain our confessional unity with the weight of our collective confession. Our voice simply grows louder when we speak together. That is true when we confess to the world and when we encourage one another in God's truth.

Every individual Christian also has a God-given responsibility to witness. Locally each gathering of Christians—each congregation—has the privilege of sharing the good news of Jesus with its community.

But sharing the gospel stretches beyond the horizon of the local congregation. Together we are to make disciples of all nations. While each congregation sees the fields "ripe for harvest" in its own backyard, the Lord places opportunities and opens doors far beyond that local field. Together congregations can reach places that they couldn't reach on their own. By pooling our financial resources and encouraging one another, we can send missionaries to other cities in our own country and to foreign fields as well.

Congregations also understand that a day will come when they will need to replace or add a pastor, teacher, or staff minister. Training a new generation of called workers is better done together.

Certainly congregations train their own children in various ways and even join to form federations that provide high school and college education. But the single purpose of the schools operated by our

synod—no matter at what level—remains the same. Those schools exist to supply congregations of the synod with called workers—either as replacements or as a new generation of workers—to carry out their own ministries.

In all three of these examples—expressing a unity of doctrine, conducting mission work, and educating future called workers—it should be clear that the synod, this voluntary gathering of local congregations, is doing what is more difficult for individual congregations to do on their own. And we do other things together as well. All the work we decide to do together requires financial and human resources. Without those resources, we cannot do the work together effectively.

As we look at what we do together, we thank our Lord, who has purchased us with his blood. We praise him for the privilege of participating in the work of his kingdom. Under his care and by his power, we have grown from the small confessional Lutheran groups in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. Our confession remains true to the doctrine of the evangelical Lutheran church. God has blessed our efforts to establish new congregations so that we can share the gospel far beyond our midwestern base. Our missions extend into many nations of the world, and the schools we maintain continue to supply congregations with called workers who are committed to the truth of God's Word. The tasks have sometimes been difficult and challenging, but the Lord has permitted us to share his truth in this world so desperately in need of it.

*This article is derived from a section of the Ad Hoc Commission's final report that defines the mission and purpose of the synod. The report will be discussed at the synod convention this July. To read the entire report, go to [www.wels.net/jump/adhoc](http://www.wels.net/jump/adhoc).*





# my wake-up call

After a life-threatening accident, a young man, realizing that God had plans for him, works to make a difference in others' lives.

Alicia A. Neumann

**"I** could be taking a dirt nap right now, but God let me live. God had plans for me."

Those are the words of Noah Dettore, a 26-year-old member at Grace, Flint, Mich., as he reflects on the car accident that almost claimed his life two years ago. Although it has been a long, hard road, Noah says the accident changed his life—in a good way.

#### **The wake-up call**

Noah says that his life before the accident wasn't exactly God-pleasing. "I hadn't really been going to church before," he remembers. "And I used to be addicted to cocaine and stuff. It was horrible. I think God used the

crash to save me from dying from a drug overdose."

What Noah refers to as his "wake-up call" happened on Feb. 22, 2007. He was on his way to Saginaw to visit his father, who'd just undergone quadruple bypass heart surgery. Noah was driving over a bridge when he hit a Michigan DOT vehicle. The impact sent his truck flying end over end—Noah says it flew about the length of a football field—before it went off the bridge and fell about 450 feet.

Noah's injuries were life threatening. In fact, at the scene of the accident, he says that rescue workers thought they'd lost him twice. Noah was rushed to the hospital where his



family kept vigil at his side. "They were all convinced Noah was going to die that night," says Walter Oelhafen, the pastor at Grace who was at the hospital ministering to the Dettos. "They were talking about his funeral." But by God's grace, Noah pulled through.

Everyone thanked God that Noah's life was spared, but for Noah the struggle had just begun. "Well, I just remember waking up, and I understood that I was in an accident and that I was in the hospital," says Noah. But after learning about the extent of his injuries—including the very real possibility that he may never walk again—Noah says he took the news pretty hard: "At first I was thinking about suicide."

Oelhafen remembers ministering to Noah in those dark hours. "Noah just felt so guilty," he says. "He thought that life was just over for him, that God couldn't or wouldn't forgive him for the things he'd done." But Oelhafen says he pointed Noah to the cross to help him see the full and free forgiveness that is ours through Jesus and the hope and comfort it brings. He also reminded Noah that his life wasn't over—and that he could make a difference in other peoples' lives too.

"I told him, 'You can curse the day you were born or you can look at life and say, 'Wow, look at all these opportunities God has given me!''" says Oelhafen. "It's like the story of Abraham: God didn't tell him, 'Go count the darkness.' He said, 'Go count the stars.'"

With God's help, Noah says his outlook soon began to change. "I started going to church again, and I got to see that God had plans for me," he says.

#### **A new lease on life**

Noah says God is now using him to be an encouragement to other people.

"It's not about me. It's about helping others," he says. "That's more important than just worrying about myself. It's about helping others deal with their situations too."

Soon after Noah began attending church again, Oelhafen asked him if he would like to be part of Grace's special ministries committee. "He said, 'Well I can't do that,'" Oelhafen remembers. "And I said, 'You can't do it, or you won't?'" Noah asked me if he could think about it for a month, and the next time I visited him he said, "Pastor, do you think I could do it? Do you think people would believe me? Do you think there would be some purpose for my being there?"

Oelhafen says the answer has been a resounding yes. "Noah's been such an inspiration in so many ways; it's just unbelievable," he says. "When he came up to the front of the church for installation, people were just mesmerized. At the time, he was in a wheelchair. But Noah said the other guys were walking up there and so could he. He was so determined. He walked up to the front part of the church to shake my hand, and you might imagine there wasn't a dry eye in the house."

Oelhafen says Noah is now sending cards and visiting shut-ins and members living in nursing homes. "Before I don't think Noah would have gone to visit a shut-in if his life depended on it," says Oelhafen. "And now he just loves to talk about how good God has been to him and how God has blessed him and how he's got a new lease on life. He's going down a whole different road."

#### **Counting the blessings**

Noah says that even though it's caused a lot of pain, he sees the accident as a blessing. "What I know is that God had bigger plans for me because he didn't just let me die,"

says Noah. "I'm here, and I'm getting around better, and I'm becoming more independent every day."

Through intensive therapy, Noah is still struggling to regain the physical capabilities he lost in the accident. Although he has a long way to go, Noah is happy to see how things are progressing. "I started going through therapy, and it made me realize that I could learn to walk again and could learn to talk again," he says. "And I just started working very hard. I could not wait until the next day so I could learn to walk better."

He says he hopes to be able to walk without crutches soon because he has big plans. "The first thing I'm going to do after I walk is get my [driver's] license, and then I can start getting into the special ministries even more," he says.

Oelhafen says he is so thankful to see how Noah has grown and how he is a positive influence on his family and friends. "They are seeing some of the things Noah has learned and how he had to learn them the hard way," says Oelhafen. "And Noah's trying to help them see that if you don't learn things the easy way, God may provide you with a path that's a little more difficult."

Although he continues to work through the spiritual and physical problems caused by his past, Noah hopes his story will be an inspiration to others. "I know that other people [going through tough times] can get better, because I did," he says. "I went through a horrible accident and just struggled to get where I am. But I know that Jesus is with me, and he had everything to do with getting me to where I am today, for sure."

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Mark Schweden

## Challenging times; a gracious God

**T**he economic crisis and the recession that is gripping our nation have affected all of us. The impact has hit close to home, as people struggle with layoffs, salary reductions, making payments on their mortgages and credit cards, and higher costs for energy and food.

Our synod has also been affected by these economic conditions. As I write this article, synodical leaders are in the final stages of developing a budget that will require significant reductions in the work that we do as a synod.

The planning efforts have focused on two things: reducing expenses significantly across all areas of ministry and considering plans for the future that will stabilize our financial situation and help us avoid a repeat of the circumstances that require sudden and drastic cutbacks in ministry.

As areas of ministry make plans for the next two years, they have been asked to make reductions first in administrative costs—personnel, travel, and meetings. The budget process is not complete, but some reductions have already been identified. In Ministry Support alone (which includes the President's Office, Financial Services, Communication Services, Technology Office, Ministry of Christian Giving, and facilities), approximately 14 positions will be eliminated. Administrative cuts in the areas of ministry will add to this total. Synodical schools will be reducing faculty size by increasing the number of teaching hours for faculty members. Salaries for synodical workers will be frozen at current levels.

Once administrative reductions have been identified, the areas of ministry have been asked to determine what ministry programs will be reduced or eliminated. It's a painful and difficult process, but the reality of our financial situation requires it.

The second focus of planning has been to consider ways to stabilize the funding for our synod's ministry. We have typically planned our ministry on *anticipated* income. But more than once in recent years, and especially in 2008–2009, the income actually received was far less than what was anticipated. When that happens, sudden and drastic reductions need to be made. Or when cuts are deemed too difficult, we have resorted to special appeals and offerings to maintain our level of ministry. It's noble and commendable to want to do more, but we have tried to support ongoing ministry with one-time dollars, often with frustrating results.

To address this recurring problem and to plan wisely for the future, the Synodical Council is developing a budgeting process that will create a "Financial Stability Fund." In this plan, all sources of income other than from Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) will be set aside into this fund for one year and will only be spent the next year. In other words, instead of carrying out ministry based on uncertain anticipated income, we will plan our ministry based on dollars already received and actually on hand. This will not prevent all reductions in the future, but if reductions need to occur, we will have at least one full year to plan for them.

This process has been difficult for everyone involved. The decisions facing the convention in July will also be difficult and painful. In spite of the challenges, however, we place our trust in our loving God, who has promised that he will be with us, that he will bless us, and that he will turn all things to our good. We trust that the same God who often blesses us with abundance will also bless us in a time of shortage.

Our times indeed are in his hands. What better place is there?



# believe in the HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit reveals to us the secret things of God. Charles F. Degner

**I**t was a dark day when Adam and Eve fell into sin. That one sin condemned them to life without God.

## Man's natural knowledge of God is limited

It also contaminated their spirits and left them without a perfect knowledge of God. You see the effects of sin when Adam and Eve hid from God among the trees of the garden. Didn't they know that God was all-seeing, all-knowing? Sin acted like a virus on a hard drive and erased the information they really needed to know about God. Our first parents passed down this ignorance of God to every one of us.

You see this ignorance in almost everything you read about God in the popular press. An article in *Time* magazine quotes a sampling of human opinion:

"A young Washington scientist suggests that 'God, if anything, is hydrogen and carbon. Then again, he might be thermonuclear fission, since that's what makes life on this planet possible.' To a streetwalker in Tel Aviv, 'God will get me out of this filth one day. He is a God of mercy, dressed all in white and sitting on a golden throne.' A Dutch charwoman says: 'God is a ghost floating in space.' Screenwriter Edward Anhalt (Becket) says that 'God is an infantile fantasy, which was necessary when men did not understand what lightning was. God is a cop-out.' A Greek janitor thinks that God is 'like a fiery flame, so white that it can blind you.' 'God is all that I cannot understand,' says a Roman seminarian. A Boston scientist describes God as 'the totality of harmony in the universe.' Playwright Alfred muses: 'It is the voice which says, "It's not good enough"—that's what God is'" (April 8, 1966).

This article was probably shocking to most people when it was written. Today most people would agree that every-

one's opinion about God is somehow valid. But by ourselves we can only guess what God is like.

Paul wrote, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9,10). Our limited natural knowledge of God can imagine that God is powerful. But nothing in nature or in ourselves can tell us about God's love and mercy.

## God revealed himself by the Spirit

But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. How does he do this? Paul wrote further, "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:12-14). God speaks to us through the words that

the Holy Spirit inspired men to write. The words tell us of Jesus. What's more, the Holy Spirit accompanies those words so that men and women can understand them.

This is why we believe. It is not by our own thinking and choosing, but because God has revealed himself to us by his Spirit.

*Contributing editor Charles Degner is pastor at St. Peter, St. Peter, Minnesota.*

*This is the first article in an eight-part series on the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed.*





*John B. Zeman*

## Should the church change? Part 3

No. Yes. Maybe. The third answer gets more complicated. We must understand two principles. First, we are not free to alter the Scriptures, the Ten Commandments, or anything else God has clearly revealed to us. Second, we are free to do anything that God has neither forbidden nor commanded. So then can we change anything that God has left open to us?

The apostle Paul advises, "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive" (1 Corinthians 10:23). Just because we can change things does not mean that we should.

If the change does not build faith but instead troubles the faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ, we might choose not to change. If a change is necessary, we will go about making the change in such a way that it does not destroy the faith of believers.

As God's people we must understand that we are all intertwined as part of his church here on earth. We know that without faith in Jesus there is no hope of forgiveness, life, or salvation. None of us wants to do something that will destroy the faith of another. So we are careful about what we do. Love for others in God's household guides us in our discussions of proposed changes so that what is adopted—if it is a change or not—is beneficial and constructive to the others in Christ's church.

As believers we are also concerned about what those outside the visible church think of our changes. Two examples: We might be free to serve beer or wine after our congregational meetings, but we don't. That would give the wrong impression of our beliefs to those who do not know us. And we don't immerse people at Baptism either. Certainly we can, but that might

give the impression that we hold a view of Baptism that requires immersion, and that is not biblical. So we don't.

We have to ask difficult questions when thinking about change. Does our action imply that we have changed our beliefs? Do our changes make us just like everyone else and minimize the teachings God has led us to hold dear? Do changes amount to little more than a "bait and switch" strategy? In other words, do we change to attract others who expect us to be like the church down the street but then we require them to switch to a host of Bible teachings not believed by the church down the street?

Sometimes change in our practice has a way of influencing change in our beliefs too. For example, as Lutherans we believe that the gospel is the center of all we do. Our liturgy helps us maintain that focus with the readings and sermon. We create worship that gives the gospel a central place. What happens to that emphasis when the focus shifts to provide entertaining experiences in worship? If we don't change do we become elitists who treasure only 16th-century music? Yet adopting other forms might remove the gospel from center stage. Certainly we are free to change, but maybe the change will not be beneficial to God's people. These are tough questions.

Once we think the church needs change, we come to the beginning of the discussion, not the end of it. We may not all agree, but we all need to treat one another with love and respect in the debates and discussion.

We must be careful about making changes in those things which God has given us freedom to change. Yes, we are free to change, but not all changes are beneficial.



# THE APOSTLES

## St. Thomas: From doubt to faith

A brave follower. A dedicated disciple. And then, a self-absorbed doubter. Thomas, the twin, missed seeing Jesus that first Easter day. His doubts, no doubt, consumed him. But then one week later, Jesus again appeared.

### READ JOHN 20:24-29

<sup>24</sup>Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

<sup>28</sup>Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

<sup>29</sup>Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

### DIGGING INTO THE VERSES

1. Everything we know about Thomas comes from St. John's gospel. Look up these passages and describe what you discover about Thomas' character.

- John 11:16
- John 14:5

2. Thomas missed the first appearances of Jesus on Easter Sunday. When he arrived, the disciples kept on telling him about Jesus' resurrection (v. 25). Who were some of the people who could bring their testimony about the resurrection to Thomas?

- John 20:1-9
- John 20:11-18
- Luke 24:13-32
- Luke 24:34
- John 20:19-23

3. Evaluate the importance of each of these testimonies. What about each should have affected Thomas?

4. Read verse 25. In light of the disciples' testimony, what does that lead you to conclude about Thomas' unbelief?
5. What insight does that give you when you are testifying to an unbeliever?
6. What does it teach you about faith?
7. Compare Jesus' words in verse 26 and verse 19. What comfort does that give you?
8. How is verse 27 a magnificent example of the grace and love of Jesus?
9. Evaluate Thomas' response.

### BRINGING IT HOME

1. What are some of the things that Jesus asks you to believe without seeing?
2. Jesus calls us blessed, but often we're just like Thomas, wanting to see what God promised instead of simply believing it. What promises of God are the hardest for you to believe without seeing? What demands do you make of God?
3. When we act like Thomas, how does Jesus come and show himself to us?

### MORE ABOUT ST. THOMAS

God moved Thomas from doubt to faith. For the rest of his life, this man who had demanded to see Jesus proclaimed an unseen Jesus to a watching world. Early church fathers say that Thomas preached the gospel as far as India, and there are still Christians in India today who claim descent from the church Thomas founded. In Christian art, St. Thomas is often depicted with a spear, the traditional means of his martyrdom. The church celebrates the Feast of St. Thomas on Dec. 21 each year. The Gospel for that festival is John 20:24-29.

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*This is the eighth article in a 12-part series on Jesus' apostles. Find this study and answers online after June 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net)*





# The sound the

# FISH makes

In life and in death, think fish: Jesus, Christ, God's Son, Savior.

Eric S. Hartzell

The teacher asked her kindergarten class what sound a duck makes. The little boy's hand shot up. "Aflac!" he said. He wasn't kidding either. That was the only sound he had ever heard a duck make. American Family Life Assurance Company execs would be proud of the little boy's knowledge. They would be happy too.

Of course, we all know what the Government Employees Insurance Company's little gecko says and how he says it. We even know the accent of the gecko . . . even a caveman knows this! How can we ever look at a gecko again without thinking of the cute little guy who brags about his company's insurance?

So two insurance companies use a duck and a gecko to get you thinking about them and what they offer you. Their offers come at a price, of course.

## Another insurance animal

For two thousand years another group has been using a fish to remind people of their life assurance/insurance plan. A fish! And this fish turns up in strange places. Some fashion the fish into gold designs and hang it around their necks. Others put the fish on their refrigerator doors. Probably most often you see this fish on someone's rear bumper while you are waiting for the light to change.

If you spoke Greek about two thousand years ago and someone said the names "Jesus, Christ, God's Son, Savior" in that order, you might think of the Greek word *ixthus* or *ichthus*. Nevermind the spelling differences.

It's the same thing in Greek: "Fish!"

In one carol at Christmastime all four of these wonderful names of Jesus are mentioned:

Jesus—"Jesus, Lord, at thy birth"

Christ—"Christ, the Savior, is born!"

God's Son—"Son of God, love's pure light"

Savior—"Christ, the *Savior*, is born!"  
*Ixthus!* Fish!

## God's insurance policy for sinners

Why should we remember this as we remember "Aflac"? Because it's God's insurance policy. He saw your life, and he saw it needed saving. He still says you can't save your life. He "so" loved you that he sent his one and only Son to assure you of life eternal. He says the only one who can write the policy is his Son, Jesus Christ. His angel told Joseph and Mary, "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). God's Son, Jesus, is your personal Savior. *Ixthus!* Your life is constantly being threatened by the devil, the world, and your own evil nature. Those are the real threats. They are why you need the Savior. God in his grace has given you what you need.

In life and in death, think fish: Jesus, Christ, God's Son, Savior. Your eternal life insurance coverage does not just come to you cheaper than the competition; it comes to you absolutely free. There are plenty of imitations, but there is only one real eternal life policy. Only Jesus makes the offer, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25,26).

So as a Christian when someone asks you, "What does the fish on your bumper say?" you can answer, "Jesus, Christ, God's Son, Savior."

That's the wonderful sound this fish makes.

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